

NEGRO HOUSING IN PORTLAND

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Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

The American Negro has been as much a topic of conversation in the past few years as he was in the Civil War days. Fortunately for the American public, much of this publicity has brought about welcome changes in the status of the Negro.

The Negro problem is not one peculiar to the South, or to vague areas of the North. It is a problem also in Oregon, and, more specifically, in Portland. Since World War II, the Negro in Portland has been a problem of growing concern to many people.

In 1940 Portland had a Negro population of 1,932. Of these, 97 per cent were domestic workers, railroad workers, or laborers. With the advent of the war and the rise of ship-yards and other war plant jobs, 22,000 Negroes were attracted to the area. Shipbuilding or allied work employed 96 per cent of these "in-migrants".¹ At the close of the war, these people were out of jobs.

Since then, Portland's Negro population has leveled off at about 11,000. Job opportunities have increased considerably since the state legislature in 1949 passed the Fair Employment Practices Law. Economic status has ceased to be the number one problem of the Negro. In this respect his load has been lightened, but he has many other worries.

One of the greatest problems of the Portland Negro today is housing. Over 50 per cent of the Negro population is crowded into the Albina or Williams Avenue district, which is about two miles long and one mile wide.²

1. Urban League of Portland. First Annual Report, 1945.

2. City Club of Portland. The Negro in Portland. Portland City Club Bulletin, Progress Report, 1945-1957, p. 357.

During and immediately after the war, much of the excess Negro population was taken up by the Guild's Lake and Vanport public housing developments. However, these were either closed down or flooded out in 1948, leaving many Negroes as well as whites with no homes. The Williams Avenue area was forced to absorb much of this population. It is thus more crowded today than it was ten years ago, when there were more Negroes in Portland.

Negroes are forced to live in this crowded, ancient, unhealthy and wholly inadequate section because they cannot get housing elsewhere. The conditions under which they live, besides being an added expense to the taxpayer, affect almost every aspect of Negro life, including the incentive for self-improvement. These housing conditions are productive only of broken homes and a higher incidence of crime than for the city as a whole. In one neighborhood school, 42 per cent of the children have only one parent at home.³ According to a Portland City Club Bulletin, most white Portlanders "are unaware of the social and economic problems which face the city's Negro population." The Bulletin also states that city officials are lax in doing anything about the situation.

In many aspects, the Negro's problems have greatly improved over the past ten years. In 1945, most of the hotels, restaurants, motels and many places of recreation refused service to Negroes. By 1952 the major hotels and restaurants in downtown Portland had changed their discriminatory policies to more tolerant ones. In 1953 the Public Accommodation Law was passed, outlawing all forms of discrimination in places of public accommodation, resort or amusement. This was a much needed reform.

3. Ibid. p. 359.

As for economic opportunities, "the economic front has offered the American Negro the best chance for breaking through the stone wall of discrimination."⁴ Qualified Negroes today have more employment opportunities than they have ever had before. The housing situation remains now to be improved, as other phases of Negro life have been improved in the past few years.

Two of the factors which cause the minority housing problem in Portland are the relatively low income of the Negroes and a pattern of resistance on the part of white neighborhoods to nonwhite purchase of homes in their areas.

Because of their low incomes, many Negroes simply cannot afford to move, as there is no low-rent housing available to them. As in many cities throughout the country, the Negro is forced to pay high rent for inadequate accommodations, simply because there is such a demand for these accommodations among those who cannot move out of the segregated district. Often a Negro will pay more for poor housing than whites pay for adequate housing.

The resentment against Negroes moving into a white section is a great problem in housing. The basis of the problem may stem from the attitude of realtors in the area. Until 1952, the official position of the Portland Realty Board was the doctrine that Negroes depress property values. The Board had a "code of ethics" which forbade a realtor to introduce a nonwhite into a white district. This doctrine is now officially abandoned, but according to the City Club Bulletin, "it is common knowledge in many circles that 90 per cent or more of the real estate brokers in Portland will not sell a home to a Negro in a white neighborhood even

4. Ibid. p. 362.

though the prospective buyer can handle the deal financially." The Bulletin states that "real estate brokers represent the biggest single obstacle to Negroes in their quest for equal housing opportunities."

The realtors contend that they have a duty to maintain property values, and that selling to a Negro would violate this trust. They say there would be much resentment in the white areas that would hurt their business if they would sell to Negroes. Realtors also fear that if they sell some units of a new development to Negroes, whites will refuse to buy the other units. However, several realtors in the area, nonmembers of the Realty Board, work closely with the Negroes in finding them suitable housing.

It has been shown many times that nonwhite neighbors do not depress property values. One of the latest studies is a survey conducted by the Urban League of Portland. In this survey, entitled "Nonwhite Neighbors and Property Prices in Portland, Oregon," the League states:

"The contention that the introduction of nonwhites into a residential area invariably results in a depreciation of property values, or that it necessarily endangers property values, is found by this study to be unsupported by fact and without valid foundation." However, the belief is still held by many people.

Studies show that values decline when whites, living in housing accessible to Negroes, fear an onsurge of Negro tenants. They then panic and flee, selling at lower than usual prices. This is one basis for the property devaluation belief. Another basis is the condition of the housing the majority of Negroes live in now, and the fact that most other housing open to Negroes is in older white neighborhoods that are already declining in value.

A colored realtor in the San Francisco area says this about the theory: "White people take fright, signs go up all round FOR SALE. If they'd wait, they'd get their price. If they sell in panic, they lose; but it's their own prejudice they're paying for." He adds that most property loss is due to prejudice, not depreciation.⁵

Negroes have integrated successfully in many areas of the city. In those areas where there are no nonwhites, it would seem that a major cause of housing discrimination is the white majority's lack of knowledge about the Negro. This "ignorance", or reliance on a stereotyped idea, gives rise to the predominant attitudes and fears. "Negroes, as a general rule, are not accepted on equal terms by the Portland white community," says the City Club.

According to the Urban League of Portland in 1946, this was true about the community:

"There is a definite paradox in race relations in Portland. Portland presently denies Negroes jobs, then calls them shiftless; segregates them under conditions which breed delinquency, then calls them vicious; deprives them of incentive for education and self-improvement, then calls them ignorant and undesirable."⁶

This statement may be true in many ways in Portland today. Again in 1947, the Urban League reported that "in the arena of race relations, Portland is the most improved city in the nation." It adds, however, that

5. Paton, Alan. "The Negro in the North." Colliers, October 29, 1954.

6. Urban League of Portland. Second Annual Report, 1946.

this is because it started so low on the scale, not because it has climbed so high. Much has been gained in improving race relations in Portland over the past ten years, but there is much improvement yet to be made if Negroes are going to be able to claim the freedom and equality which is rightfully theirs. "A Negro has not very often been permitted to be an American first and a Negro second."⁷

Alan Paton, novelist, said in his article, "The Negro in the North," "The cry of the Negro is no longer, 'Let my people go'; it is, 'Let my people in.'" He also asks this thought-provoking question:

"If a man with one drop of colored blood is a colored man, than what is a nation with one colored citizen?"⁸

The precise problem I will be working with is the housing situation of the Portland Negro at present, and the ways in which it can be improved. I will attempt to explain the inadequacy of the housing. If conditions are not improved soon, the area will continue to degenerate into more of a slum area than it is now. It already breeds conditions characteristic of slums, such as broken homes and delinquency. The area is a sore spot in the heart of the ever-growing Portland community, and a growing burden to the taxpayers. I will present several possible solutions to this problem, and attempt to explain the solution which I think will work best.

7. City Club of Portland. The Negro in Portland. Portland City Club Bulletin, Progress Report, 1945-1957, p. 355.

8. Paton, Alan. "The Negro in the North." Colliers, October 29, 1954.

Limitation of Thesis

I will not attempt to cover in this thesis the problem of racial prejudice generally, nor the problem of the status of the Negro. My analysis will be confined to the Portland area, except insofar as similar circumstances in other areas serve as examples. I will not attempt to deal with employment or social conditions, unless they have a direct bearing on the problem of housing. I will try to cover housing in all its aspects.

Chapter II

History and Development of the Problem

The history of the Negro in America begins with the first slaves that were brought over from Africa to serve on the Southern plantations. For many years these Negroes lived on the plantations of white owners. As slaves, they were dependent upon their owners for all their needs.

When the slaves were freed, many did not know how to get along in the world. Freedom to them was a new and different state of existence, and they did not know quite what to make of it. The white man did little to help the bewildered Negro. Though the Negroes were freedmen, the white men refused to look upon them as equals. This statement, written shortly after the emancipation, reflects the white feeling of the time:

"The whites esteem the blacks their property by natural right, and however much they admit that the individual relations of masters and slaves have been destroyed by the war and by the President's emancipation proclamation, they still have an ingrained feeling that the blacks at large belong to the whites at large."¹

This was the beginning of the Negro's fight for equality that is still waging. As time progressed, the Negro gradually left his southern rural home and migrated to the cities of the South and the North. The present-day social problem of the Negro begins with this Northward migration.

1. Frazier, E. Franklin. The Negro in the United States. New York: Macmillan Company, 1957, p. 128.

The larger northern cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and New York received the greatest share of these early migrants. Because of differences in culture and the strangeness of the city, Negroes banded together in various sections of the city. For the Negroes, city life, as compared to their former rural economic status, was a haven of prosperity.

The most noted of these Negro areas that arose by the 1920's was New York City's celebrated Harlem. This "Black Manhattan" became a symbol of grand urban living among Negroes.² Another black belt developed in Chicago's South Side. Not as intellectual and artistic a center as Harlem, it was given over more to machine-ridden politics. Here Negroes established businesses, made money and lived in mansions on beautiful boulevards.

"It mattered little in the wild Twenties if the neighborhoods were already on the decline or if the structures...were architecturally obsolete. They became the symbol of the economic success of Black America."³

This pattern was repeated in other cities. The Negroes concentrated in one area, with less dense groupings in other areas throughout the city. However, new hopes and dreams were lost for many of them with the coming of the depression. With no work, idleness and crime spread rapidly. The previously "grand" ghettos began to deteriorate, to become "sore spots" in the city.

As more Negroes came, conditions became worse. Low incomes and high rents limited housing opportunities. However, despite the

2. Weaver, Robert C. The Negro Ghetto. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948, p. 3.

3. Ibid.

worsening conditions, colored workers stayed in the northern cities, and more kept coming.

"For all the congestion and disillusionment of a large part of the black belt, it offered a far better life than the migrants had known in the South."⁴

With World War II, many more Negroes migrated to the cities, and were forced to find housing in the already crowded Negro areas. The percentage increase of nonwhites in 12 of the largest cities between 1940 and 1950 was: New York City, 62.4; Chicago, 80.5; Philadelphia, 49.5; Los Angeles, 116.2; Detroit, 101.4; Baltimore, 35.9; Cleveland, 76.1; St. Louis, 41.4; Boston, 68.6; San Francisco, 155.9; Pittsburgh, 32.9; Milwaukee, 144.7.⁵ Note especially the tremendous rate of increase for the two West Coast cities.

The Negro's status has improved greatly in the past ten years, not only in his earning power and the opportunities open to him, but also in his interrelations with other people. Nevertheless, the battle is not yet won.

The history of the Negro in Portland is similar to that of the North as a whole. Before World War II, there were about 2,000 Negroes in Portland. Most of them were employed in domestic work, railroad work, or as common laborers. With the war and war industries, 20,000 Negroes came to Portland. Of these, 96 per cent were employed in shipbuilding or allied work.

4. Ibid.

5. National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing. "The High Cost of Bad Housing." Anti-Defamation League Bulletin, 1953.

This tremendous influx of colored workers created a great many problems, particularly in housing. However, many social problems were also raised by these newcomers. Vice and delinquency were rampant in the Williams Avenue Negro district. Much of the ill-famed reputation of the area was nurtured during these war years. Many of the new migrants were unmarried young men who, because they were segregated from most recreational activities in the city, often resorted to illegal means of "letting off steam".

After the war, when the Negro population had leveled off at about 12,000, many service organizations attempted to improve the status of the Negro. The Urban League of Portland, a branch of the National Urban League, has constantly been crusading for the betterment of the Negro's status since it began in 1945. The Negro Citizens and Taxpayers League, a group of Negroes working to improve their own conditions, said in 1946:

"Negroes in Portland are discriminated against in all areas of human endeavor such as: Work opportunity, housing, in use of public accommodations, in obtaining insurances, and in making use of certain training opportunities." It adds, however: "We must recognize, first, that we as Negroes have not done all that we could or should have done to improve our own conditions or the lot of our fellows."⁶

The lot of the Negro was not a pleasant one in those days after the war. The Negro population was stabilizing, and all "out-migration" was being cancelled by the continuous "in-migration". According to the 1946 Urban League report:

6. Negro Citizens and Taxpayers League. The Status of Negroes in Portland. 1946, p.2.

"The community now has no choice but to integrate or starve these people. At the close of 1946, it seems that the choice has been in favor of starving them."

At that time, out of approximately 4500 Negroes in the labor market, about 1500 were out of jobs. Those employed were again relegated to the "usual" jobs---railroading, domestic and personal service, and unskilled labor.⁷ The Urban League reports that "Most Portland Negroes had settled down to a life of dreadful mediocrity and decided that white folks were mean, un-democratic and hypocritical, and that such traits were racial characteristics of Caucasians."

These feelings stem from practices such as this, common in Portland at the time: All but one major downtown establishment for public accomodation (restaurants, theatres, etc.) practiced discrimination on the basis of race.

The situation in Portland, however, was not so completely one of prejudice as it was a general apathy and lack of awareness. The Urban League stated:

"We sincerely believe that many of the inequalities and injustices directed against Negroes in Portland are bred more often by misinformation than by malice."⁸

With the concerted efforts of several groups, the situation began to improve somewhat. In 1947, the Portland Housing Authority, which had formerly discriminated against minority groups, adopted a non-discrimination policy. In 1949, Oregon became the nation's sixth state to enact a good Fair Employment Practices law. In 1953,

7. Urban League of Portland. Second Annual Report. 1946, p. 2.

8. _____ . First Annual Report. 1945, p. 3.

Oregon passed the public accommodations or civil rights law. During this period also the Portland Realty Board dropped its formal policy of discrimination against minority groups.

These improvements are only a small part of the work yet to be done. According to E.B. MacNaughton, president of the First National Bank in 1945:

"No solution to the relations of the community to the Negro is going to be found in the wishful thought that most of the Negroes in Portland will return whence they came."⁹

Neither is the solution to be found in segregation or discrimination. "Some definite progress has been made, as it has throughout the country. But...prejudice and discrimination still exist in Portland, to the degree at least that most Negroes have not in any realistic sense been 'harmoniously integrated' into Portland's community life."¹⁰

The problem of most concern to the northern Negro today is that of housing. With the migration to the cities, the concentration of Negroes in the black belts became more and more intense. As a result, facilities that were none too good to begin with became increasingly crowded and inadequate. And the more Negroes that moved into the Northern cities, the more intensified became the segregation that had been voluntary to begin with, but was now enforced.

9. Moxness, Ron. "Negroes in Portland: What is Their Postwar Outlook?" Portland: The Oregonian, June 17, 1945.

10. City Club of Portland. The Negro in Portland. Portland City Club Bulletin, Progress Report, 1945-1957, p. 355.

"The 1950 census shows that the dilapidation of nonwhite housing outside rural areas is five times as high for Negroes as it is for whites, that the proportion of homes lacking piped running water, private flush toilet, bathtub or shower is more than twice as high."¹¹

With the continuous urban migration, there were two alternatives as to housing for the Negro. The black belts could attempt to absorb more of the Negro population, or the Negroes could move from the black belt into surrounding areas. As the color line was broken in the employment field, more Negroes were able to afford better housing than they could get in the ghetto areas. Because of segregation policies, however, they were unable to move.

The Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution forbids racial and religious discrimination by state governments. Decisions of the Supreme Court have established that this includes acts of legislatures, courts and administrative bodies as well as cities and villages.

"Under these provisions, it clearly is unconstitutional for public officials to discriminate in admitting applicants to housing owned or operated by federal, state or local governments."¹²

However, only outright segregation is covered by this law, such as excluding a minority group altogether, or setting a quota for those admitted, or providing inferior facilities. Many of the publicly supported housing projects allow Negroes, but separate them within the project.

11. National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing. op.cit.

12. National Community Relations Advisory Council. Equality of Opportunity in Housing. November, 1952, p. 35.

The problem of housing for the Negro essentially becomes the problem of segregation. While this policy exists, the Negro is forced to take what he can get in the way of housing, which is often the poorest on the market.

"Discrimination and segregation in housing impose a steady drain upon the economic, sociological and psychological resources of the community. Not only the victims of this evil, but all of society, pay a high toll for its continued existence."¹³

"There is growing pressure to eliminate discrimination in housing just as there is pressure to end discrimination in employment and other fields. Public housing projects in New York have been non-segregated for many years. There will be no segregation in future developments in Washington, D.C. In San Francisco a non-segregation policy has been adopted for all urban redevelopment projects. The basic idea is to put into practice the edicts of the courts that racial covenants are inconsistent with the U.S. Constitution."¹⁴

Segregation in ghettos is a fairly recent phenomenon. In the last part of the nineteenth century, before the great migration to the North, heterogeneous neighborhoods were the rule. The most direct and usually the most effective argument in favor of segregation is that Negroes decrease property values when they move into an all-white neighborhood. This widely-accepted theory has been shown many times to be false in its basic assumption---that the racial characteristics of the Negroes themselves cause values to lower.

13. Ibid.

14. Anonymous. "Restricted Area: Does It Pay?" U.S. News & World Report. October 23, 1953, p. 52.

According to Robert Weaver in his book, The Negro Ghetto, "There is no one universal effect of Negro occupancy upon property values." Other factors enter into the situation, such as the state of the local housing market and the manner in which colored people enter an area. Often prices may fall when many Negroes enter an area, but rise again after the transition is completed. However, it is generally understood that:

"When significant social and economic factors in tenancy are kept constant and race becomes the only variable, few if any differences are observed in the quality of property maintenance, conditions of occupancy, and neighborhood standards, and property values do not decline with Negro occupancy."¹⁵

What happens when Negroes try to move out of the ghettos into more suitable housing? Chicago's Trumbull Park is an example of the difficulties Negroes face in moving. This low-cost housing project located in South Deering was opened to Negroes by the Chicago Housing Authority as part of its general non-discriminatory policy in public housing.

On July 3, 1953, the Donald Howards came to Trumbull Park. Mrs. Howard, who is light-complexioned, got the apartment with no trouble. It was after the Howards moved in and it was discovered that they were Negroes that the trouble started.

On the night of August 9, a mob of 500 assembled outside the Howard apartment. That night the vandalism, which began with window smashing, was broken up by 35 police cars.

15. Weaver, Robert. The Negro Ghetto. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948, p. 294.

"Next night the unruly mob, doubled in number, gathered in and around the 26-acre development, stoning windows and cursing and jeering police. Bands of young toughs tossed lighted torches onto the project grounds, hurled rocks through the windows of passing busses that were carrying Negro passengers, damaged a nearby tavern which had accepted Negro patronage and injured five Negroes who happened to be driving by. The Howard family sat huddled in its new apartment."¹⁶

When Alan Paton, novelist, visited Trumbull Park in 1954, he wrote: "It's an unreal world, white children playing, white women staring, white and colored policemen smoking, colored men and women and children sitting behind blinds, the sun shining and the trees coming out in leaf, and the bombs. The bombs don't go off all the time; sometimes they stop, and it's just when you think: 'Maybe, maybe there'll be no more,' that they go off again."¹⁷

Negroes in the Trumbull Park project (there were about 10 families in 1953) had police escorts when they went shopping or to work. They lived in constant fear behind drawn blinds, but they didn't want to move. Another colored tenant told Alan Paton:

"We nearly moved out once. Then we thought of all the work done to get Negroes in. I wasn't prepared to see it wasted. So I felt obligated to go on. I didn't come in as a crusader. I came to get a place to live...But I'm going to stay. I had to become a crusader after all."¹⁸

16. National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing. op. cit.

17. Paton, Alan. "The Negro in the North." Colliers. October 29, 1954.

18. Ibid.

One of the most violent of outbreaks occurred in Cicero, Illinois in July, 1951, when a young Negro veteran and his family tried to move into an apartment in this all-white section.

"A mob of 5,000 gathered. Entry into the building was forced. Water and gas were turned on and fires set. Windows and window frames were smashed and thrown out into the street. All of the tenant's belongings were destroyed and the building itself was wrecked. The Cicero police, far from controlling the rioters, did all they could to intimidate the Negro family. The National Guard finally restored order after 19 persons, including four soldiers, four policemen and 11 civilians were injured."¹⁹

Riots such as these not only cause horror to the intimidated persons, but affect the minds of all those involved. Mob rule and emotions take the place of rational thinking and human compassion. In Chicago alone, attacks occurred on 59 Negro residences between 1944 and 1946; 21 attacks occurred between January and July 1951.²⁰ This pattern has been repeated in many other cities. Many are killed and injured, but no one is convicted.

Prejudiced minds are the fuel for such riots as these. People want to move the Negroes out for no other reason than the color of their skin. Said one man in Chicago: "We mean to get the jigs out, that's all...We all feel the same. There'll be a race riot, sure enough. You wait a few weeks."²¹

19. National Community Relations Advisory Council. op. cit.

20. Ibid.

21. Paton, Alan. op. cit.

Another common opinion is that the whites aren't ready for the Negroes to be integrated yet. "Let them take the Negroes out of here. Then let us re-educate the people. Then maybe the Negroes can come back."²² Alan Paton describes this forward-thinking "improver":

"Mr. Louis P. Dinnocenzo is the president of the South Deering Improvement Association. He is an American and a Christian (applause). He will not use violence, only the law (great applause). He works with Negroes, and they'll all tell you how we get along (deafening applause). But the only solution for peace is to get them out of here (pandemonium)."²³ Unfortunately, thinking such as this was the rule, rather than the exception.

Integration has been practiced successfully in many housing projects throughout the nation. There is increasing evidence that violence is not the only result of attempts at integration. For instance, the Vancouver, Washington, Housing Authority, has successfully integrated whites and Negroes since the early days of the war. "Conflict broke out when whites and Negroes were 'mixed' in dining rooms for the first time. One day in 1942 an indignant Texan walked into the housing authority office and drawled a protest at being forced to eat with Negroes. One fast-thinking official barked:

"Tell you what we'll do---we'll set aside some tables and mark them "For Texans Only!"²⁴

The housing situation in Portland has not reached such violent terms as it has in many cities, but segregation is practiced effectively all the same.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Moxness, Ron. op.cit.

The majority of Portland's Negroes live in the Williams Avenue district. This area, about one mile wide and two miles long, is located on the east side of the Willamette River, in Portland's northern section. The housing there has been overcrowded and inadequate for many years. "Recent estimates are that 4400 of the 5000 homes (not all of which are Negro by any means) in the Williams Avenue area were built prior to World War I...The City Planning Commission, in its survey of the Broadway-Steel Bridge area for urban renewal, discovered over 60 per cent of the housing to be substandard."²⁵

The housing problem for the Negroes stems from two factors: first, the relatively low income of the Negro makes it hard for him to afford a better place to live, and second, whites in various areas throughout the city show a pattern of resistance to selling or renting to nonwhites.

Until 1952, the doctrine that Negroes depress property values was the official position of the Portland Realty Board. This was their "code of ethics":

"A realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individual whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood."

Although this doctrine has been officially dropped, many realtors still refuse to do business with Negroes. Many whites in the area still believe the property devaluation theory, mainly because they know very little about actual practices and results. The Portland City Club Bulletin states, that, if there is a drop in property

25. City Club of Portland. op. cit. p. 358.

values when Negroes move into an area, "this results not from any defect inherent in non-whites as property-owners, but rather from the ignorance, fear and hostility of white people already present in the area."²⁶

J.J. Walker, broker and agent in the area, says that Negroes do not depress property values, "provided that the Negro moving into the white neighborhood takes care of his property---the lawn, shrubs, exterior---and conducts himself as is suitable to the neighborhood into which he has moved." Walker has been dealing with Negroes in Portland for 30 years.

Another real estate agent, Charles S. Williams, says the situation on Williams Avenue as of February, 1958, is not overcrowded, because increasingly more Negroes are able to afford better housing. "But the majority of houses in the Williams Avenue area are inadequate for proper living."

Williams further stated that many white homeowners have said they "would not care to sell to Negroes because they would lower the value of their property."

Walker states that "Portland at the present time does not have any low-cost integrated public housing." This presents a problem for those Negroes who can afford only the inadequate facilities of the 'black belt'.

The problems are plain: low incomes mean poor housing; uninformed people mean prejudice and misunderstanding. The solutions are yet to come.

26. Ibid. p. 360.

Chapter III

Alternative Solutions to the Problem

Finding solutions to the problem of providing better housing for Portland's Negroes is complicated by many factors. One important consideration is the low income of the Negroes, another is the inevitable problem of segregation vs. non-segregation, and still another is the attitude of realtors, many of whom will not deal with Negroes.

One of the main obstacles for the Negro is segregation. Many people still believe the Negro should be "kept in his place". They are not willing to let him move from the slum ghetto to better housing, for fear that he will "take over" the housing in the neighborhood. The problem is becoming more and more prominent. It involves much more than the fear that Negroes might move en masse into a neighborhood. Segregation is based on a long background of custom and tradition. It has been so long ingrained in the whole nation that it seems impossible that it will ever change. The theory of equality for all, regardless of race or creed, is still just that--- a theory. People too often are willing to advocate the theory for others to follow, but when it affects them personally, it doesn't work so well. However, the problem is not entirely hopeless. Time and education are gradually breaking down the barriers of tradition.

One of the ways to help break down this barrier is to integrate the new projects that are being constructed. Regardless of the type of housing, it should be as advanced in the ideas by which it is run as it is in construction. This means, of course, that the project

should be integrated, and should put the theory of equality into practice. According to the Portland City Club committee which investigated the plight of the Negro in Portland, "it is important to stress that public housing---or private---for the Negroes is not the crux of the problem. The objective should be 'integrated housing'. Modern new ghettos are only slightly less undesirable than the existing run-down, slum ghettos."¹

The ideal, of course, would be complete integration in all kinds of housing. However, this would require an extensive educational program to overcome the traditional beliefs and prejudices that whites hold against the Negroes. The education of the white majority is a gradual process which requires much time. Such an educational program has been conducted for the past several years, and will probably continue to be conducted in the future. Various service agencies such as the Urban League and the City Club have done much to dispell ill-founded rumors about the Negro, and to generally educate the populace as to his status. They have also done much to help the Negro improve himself and the conditions under which he lives.

A study conducted by the Urban League of Portland shows a tendency among younger residents to be more tolerant toward Negroes than older persons are.² This perhaps reflects a trend toward more understanding and tolerance on the part of the coming generations. Prejudice is based on culture and training. If we continue training our children in our own prejudices, they will also be prejudiced.

1. City Club of Portland. The Negro in Portland. Portland City Club Bulletin, Progress Report, 1945-1957, p. 362.

2. Urban League of Portland. Residential Attitudes Toward Negroes as Neighbors. Portland, 1956, p. 17.

If we forget our prejudices, our children will grow up with more tolerant attitudes. Perhaps with time and a new generation this tendency will become more pronounced.

Such a trend might be in prospect, but much injustice could be done to the Negro in the meantime. There is a great need now to overcome general apathy towards the problem. One way to arouse more interest in the Negro and his plight is to let Negroes move into white neighborhoods. The Urban League study showed that of those people living in close proximity to nonwhites, over two-thirds favored integration.³ If everyone had a chance to live close to a Negro family, much of the rumor and prejudice about Negroes might be dispelled. Today, many areas of Portland have successful integrated housing. All but one of Portland's census districts are inhabited by Negroes. And there are almost as many whites as Negroes in the so-called "Negro section". Integration is not impossible nor improbable. Once people become accustomed to it, they make no objection. Overcoming tradition is a big part of the problem.

Another difficulty in providing adequate housing for Negroes is the pattern of low salaries of this minority group. Even if more private housing in Portland were open to Negro renters or buyers, it would not solve the problem for many who could not afford such housing. Although Negroes have made much headway in the past few years toward getting better jobs and salaries, as a whole they are still in the low salary class. Most of the Negroes who could manage it have moved out of the ghetto. The ones who cannot afford

3. Ibid.

to move anywhere else still remain. Herein lies one of our major causes of concern. More housing can be provided, but it will do no good unless it is within the reach of the Negro's pocketbook.

Several alternatives are open in providing more housing for the Negro. The first is the expansion of the ghetto boundaries into surrounding areas. As more Portland Negroes are able, they move into the area north of the Williams Avenue district, where housing is better than that in the ghetto. This serves to alleviate the immediate problem of overcrowding, but the solution tends to inhibit the development of integration in the community. Because they fear a major influx of Negroes into the area, many white residents would like to move. Since it is an older section of town anyway, the area has a strong chance of degenerating into another unfavorable neighborhood. Thus the residents are indignant when a Negro moves onto their block. Of situations such as this, Robert Weaver says: "Residents in these areas become apprehensive and erect stronger psychological and formal barriers to the entrance of minorities."⁴ This alternative defeats our purpose of providing integrated housing rather than strengthening it. It is clear that a more suitable long-range solution must be found.

Another alternative is to provide better access for Negroes to private housing in the Portland area. This would require, among other things, a more positive attitude toward working with Negroes on the part of many of Portland's realtors. Realtors are one of the most effective links between the Negro and the white in the

4. Weaver, Robert. The Negro Ghetto. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948, p. 324.

housing process. They generally determine where the Negro can or cannot live by selling to him, or not selling, as the case may be, in certain areas. Although the Portland Realty Board has adopted a non-discrimination policy, it is well-known that most of the realtors connected with the Board still refuse to serve the Negro. There are realtors who will work with the Negro, however, and have found it a profitable business. These are located for the most part in the general Williams Avenue area. The problem of the realtor working with the Negro is again one of tradition, as well as business. For years, realtors have refused to deal with Negroes, partly because of their own beliefs and partly because of the beliefs of their clients. Even if they would like to do business with Negroes, many feel that they would lose other clients and business.

Another alternative to the housing problem is the possibility of more low cost public housing. The Portland Housing Authority now operates 309 temporary dwelling units, with both white and Negro families. It also maintains 485 permanent low-rent housing units. Of these, 437 are occupied by whites and 30 by Negroes. The Authority has operated integrated housing since 1950, and has experienced little or no difficulty as a result.

Low cost housing is operated on a non-profit basis, and tenants are charged rent according to their ability to pay and according to the accommodations they require. Such projects enable families to live in decent, adequate quarters, whereas they would not be able

to otherwise. Many of the tenants in Portland's projects now have their rent paid by welfare agencies. There is much more need for low cost housing in Portland now than there are available units. The low income inhabitants of Williams Avenue---both Negro and white---would indeed be better off if they had access to low cost housing.

According to Mr. Floyd Ratchford, former director of the Authority, "the ratio of colored to white families in Portland's public housing has risen rapidly in recent years because of the unavailability of low cost private housing for Negroes."⁵ Since there is a scarcity of low cost private housing, it is up to the city to provide public housing. There are many sites in the city of Portland that the Authority could cause to be developed along integrated lines. This would do much to help the Negro who wishes to find housing suitable to his needs and finances. Low cost projects have been successful in many cities throughout the nation, on an integrated basis. The need is great in Portland now for more such projects.

Difficulty might be encountered in finding sites for these projects, however. The Williams Avenue area is ideally suited to many Negroes because of its location. It is close to the downtown area and centrally located for much of the industrial area. In constructing new housing, the proximity to places of employment and to the downtown area must be taken into consideration.

This housing should also be on an integrated basis. Since there are so many whites in the rundown Williams Avenue district, it would

5. City Club of Portland. op. cit., p. 361.

seem that there would be much demand among them also for low rent housing. However, many of the people in the Williams Avenue district can afford better than low cost housing.

Another possibility for improving housing is through urban redevelopment. According to the City Club bulletin, "Several Portland areas such as South Auditorium, Broadway-Steel Bridge, and Williams Avenue could qualify for federal aid under the Urban Renewal programs."⁶

Urban renewal is a fairly new program---it came into being with the Federal Housing Act of 1954. Prior to that, the Housing Act of 1949 called for a program of urban redevelopment, which provided federal aid in slum clearance and in establishing low cost housing. The urban renewal program goes beyond slum clearance, however, and includes prevention of slums and blight.

Urban renewal provides federal help to a community interested in cleaning up its older, central areas, which have been forgotten in the movement to the fringes of the city. The areas usually are no longer profitable to the city, and are beginning to deteriorate. With the program, the existing and unprofitable buildings are cleaned out and new residential, commercial or industrial constructions are built. The renewed land is improved in appearance and more profitable and useful to the city.

However, urban renewal can be a threat to the minorities if it is not used properly. It can be used to displace minorities

6. Ibid.

from certain areas desirable to other factions in the community. Such was the case in Washington, D.C. in 1945. In Arlington County, the Federal Government condemned 70 acres of land owned or occupied by Negroes, displacing 225 families. "For these displaced Americans only 225 stopgap, temporary trailers were provided at the same time that FHA was assisting in the development of several thousands of permanent housing units for whites in the area."⁷

Another threat is the use of urban renewal "to reduce even further the already inadequate supply of living space available to minorities."⁸ Often, when areas are redeveloped and new housing provided, the persons who were evacuated to make way for the redevelopment are given no consideration for housing in the new projects. Nor is any thought given to where they will find housing when they are evacuated.

"If there is slum clearance and urban redevelopment or if there is new construction on land assembled by local government, there must be some coordination in order to accomplish the goals of a plan and to assure rehousing of present occupants displaced by the operation."⁹

If urban renewal were used in the Williams Avenue area, care should be taken to see that the new projects were integrated, not opened just to Negroes or just to whites. More segregated housing will not solve the problem. Also, to provide a better and more

7. Weaver, op. cit., p. 326.

8. Ibid. p. 324.

9. Ibid. p. 327.

democratic community, the projects should provide housing for a variety of incomes. A danger in housing that does not plan for a variety of incomes is that the lower income minority would move into the project in great numbers. "There is a strong possibility that if the new project were attractive to minorities, some of them would be occupied predominantly by colored families---and ultimately few whites would remain."¹⁰ A community, as it grows up naturally, is not limited to one level of income. Neither should an "artificial" community be limited. Every effort should be made to organize the project in order that every family might benefit in some degree from community life. Mutual trust and understanding are developed on a basis such as this, between races as well as within a race itself.

Where it is possible, as it is under the urban renewal plan, larger projects should be developed rather than smaller ones. This will help to ease the process of integration within the project. As Robert Weaver says, "There is greater possibility of successful interracial living in a large development that creates its own neighborhood and community than in a smaller one which takes on the neighborhood tone---including its prejudices."¹¹

The alternatives provided to solve the problem are limited, but even one could do unlimited good if it were put into action. Our task is to choose the alternative which will present the best solution, and hope that it will become a reality.

10. Ibid. p. 328.

11. Ibid. p. 333.

Chapter IV

The Best Solution

After considering the available alternatives and the facts connected with each, it seems that a program of urban renewal would be the most promising and beneficial way to tackle the problem presented by Portland's black belt. The urban renewal program, as set up by the Federal government's Housing Act of 1954, provides many possibilities for improvement that could be well used in the Williams Avenue area. As the plan is set up, Federal help is given a community desirous of setting out upon a program of improvement. The program is designed especially to help prevent slums as well as to clear out existing ones.

The housing situation in Portland at the present time leaves much to be desired. No program as yet has been set up to take care of people in inadequate housing such as is found in the Williams Avenue area. Portland has adopted an urban renewal program for the South Auditorium section of town, which is located on the west side of the Willamette River next to the downtown area. This program, which was scheduled to get under way in 1958, provides for many needed improvements. It schedules the clearing of many slum and near-slum areas, and includes a program of adequate housing for those who will be displaced from their present housing. Various sections within the area are to be cleared out and opened up to private builders for commercial and industrial uses, which would be better suited to the area than the housing which now exists there.

At present the urban renewal program has not gone beyond the planning stage, and is confined to this section of town.

Low-rent housing, as it exists in Portland right now, is quite limited, and does not begin to cover the possibilities it might. The Portland Housing Authority operates 485 permanent low-rent units and 309 temporary or "war housing" units. The temporary units are gradually being torn down, and a program of construction is under way right now to build 40 new permanent units to take the place of some of these temporary ones. These units are expected to be completed by the middle of 1958. The Authority is financially in a position to operate more low-rent housing units, if it were authorized to do so by the city council. At present it is concerned only with its existing projects.

The Williams Avenue area, which is the crux of the problem, provides inadequate and overcrowded housing because of the demand for its cheaper housing and because Negroes are often unable to find housing elsewhere. The city has grown up around this area, without providing improvements within it. Because of the community's pattern of relegating Negroes to this area and then forgetting them as much as is conveniently possible, it has deteriorated faster than many surrounding areas.

Despite its poor condition now, Williams Avenue has great potentials. It is located in a strategic position for easy access to downtown or industrial areas. It holds possibilities for housing not only those who live there now, but others who would be interested in "close-in" housing. It also holds possibilities for

commercial and industrial expansion, depending on the zoning within the district. It covers a fairly large area---one by two miles---and therefore provides much room for adequate and attractive planning. The possibilities are almost unlimited for making this a useful and valuable area. All that is lacking is the public attention needed to start the program.

The urban renewal plan provides many possibilities that could be well used in this area, to benefit not only the people living there now, but also those who might come into the area, and those in surrounding areas. It should not be too difficult to start an urban renewal plan for Williams Avenue, since Portland has already begun one program. The benefits reaped from the first plan will surely make further planning in the city easier.

The program would have many benefits other than merely clearing unsightly areas. Since community participation is required in urban renewal, more of the community would be introduced to the problems of the Negro in this section. The interest that accompanies such awareness will perhaps be helpful in providing the community as a whole with a little more understanding and consideration for the problems of the Negro. Such participation would result in more cohesiveness for the community.

The program would also be of definite benefit to the inhabitants of the area, because it would provide them with the better housing they need to live better lives. The character of their housing can make a big difference in their whole attitude toward life. More attractive conditions will make a big difference in the

neighborhood, also, by making it a more pleasant place to live for everyone in the area.

The urban renewal plan provides us with many more possibilities than the other alternatives listed in the preceding chapter. The alternative solutions represented by low cost housing and better access to private housing are both limited. They only provide additional housing to that which already exists. They are also limited as to the income groups that can take advantage of them. Only those with low incomes can take advantage of the low cost housing program, and only those with fairly high incomes can afford most of the private housing on the market today. The urban renewal plan provides for clearing out the existing bad conditions, as well as for providing adequate housing for those displaced. Both public and private housing projects can be worked in under the urban renewal plan, thus incorporating the advantages of both into one plan.

The urban renewal program should provide low-rent housing projects for those persons displaced by rehabilitation of the area. It should also provide private housing for other income levels. Such planning will allow for a more healthy and diversified community. If successfully planned, the new community could provide housing for downtown workers, students and many others, as well as for the people who live there now.

The area definitely needs and should have low-rent public housing. This housing could be operated by the Portland Housing Authority on the same basis that it operates its other projects. Low-rent housing is operated on a non-profit basis, and occupants are

charged rent according to their ability to pay and according to the accommodations they require. Such projects necessarily would need to give priority to those displaced from the Williams Avenue area, but they could also include others needing such housing. Private contractors and builders could also provide low cost as well as middle-income housing in the area.

The urban renewal program seems well designed for the Williams Avenue area. The area is not yet a slum in the worst sense, yet it has potentialities for becoming one before too long. By cleaning up the area now, the city will be saving itself work and money later on. Also, as a result of a clean-up in this area, the surrounding areas will look more attractive to prospective buyers. The plan will definitely increase the value of the property renewed, and probably the value of the property around it.

By making better use of the land, housing could be provided which will not only accommodate the Negroes now living there, but will bring in more whites to the area, thus lessening the density of Negroes in the 'black belt'. The housing projects would definitely need to be run on an integrated basis, as is the policy for low-rent housing. In this case, the integration would be to allow whites into Negro areas, rather than Negroes into white areas.

A main advantage of this program is that it requires effective, well-enforced codes and ordinances on the part of the city council to maintain the new development. Such proper enforcement is sadly lacking in the area now. This requirement of the urban renewal plan will direct the attention of the city to the conditions as they exist

now, and bring about needed improvements. Giving the Negro fairer treatment would be a good starting point in any clean-up of the Williams Avenue area.

This program would be the best alternative for the Negro, the community and the city. It can do much to defeat popular stereotyped thinking about the Negro, and to bring about better understanding between him and the community as a whole. It would also bring about greater returns for the city in the way of taxes for improved land, and in making better use of the land available in such a strategic location.

The advantages the Negro would gain from a program of urban renewal in the Williams Avenue area are almost unlimited in the scope to which they might extend. Most conspicuously, he would have better housing in which to live and cleaner, more attractive surroundings. This would have beneficial effects on his life, his work, and his incentive for self-improvement. The Negro would be given a chance to be a citizen of the community, rather than just an inhabitant of the black belt. The Negro section of Portland might soon take on the characteristics of any other section, with integration the accepted norm. Perhaps the impetus toward integration in this area will succeed in making all the citizens of Portland "color-blind", rather than just "blind" to the problems that now exist.

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Evaluation of Authorities

The Urban League, my main source of information, was started in Portland in 1945, at the height of the Negro problem. Since its beginning, it has greatly helped to improve the situation of the Negro in Portland.

The program of the Urban League is one of positive social action with professionally trained staff workers. It is constantly educating the public through newsletters and pamphlets, lectures and discussions. The improvement of the Negro situation in Portland is testimony in itself of the value of the Urban League to the community. A statement of the purposes of the League might be helpful here in determining just what it does:

It is the purpose of the Urban League of Portland to assist the community in the process of integrating Negro Americans, to the end that conditions under which they live, work, and play may be improved. It studies economic, social and industrial conditions as they affect Negroes and uses the findings to acquaint the citizenry of the Portland area with the true picture of Negroes. The League seeks to expand employment, housing, health, welfare, educational and recreational opportunity. The League works with existing organizations and encourages the formation of new agencies when the need is established and apparent. It is particularly interested in action which will promote interracial understanding and which will reduce and eliminate the causes of racial tension and violence.

A source of background information is Robert Weaver's The Negro Ghetto. This book has some good and some bad reviews, but seems to state the problem fairly well. It also has many references to the West Coast situation. According to G.W. Wakefield in the Library Journal, this is "by far the most extensive study of the Negro housing situation

in this country ever made." This may be an exaggeration, but shows the book to have some merit.

Other authorities are the City Club of Portland, whose services are somewhat similar to the Urban League, and the various housing and community relations committees of the Federal government. Several Portland realtors were contacted, and have expressed their views.